

October 2012

UPGRADING SECURITY:

Unionization and Changes in the Workforce, Wages, and Standards in the NYC Security Industry, 2004–2011

The Community Service Society Reports

A photograph of three security guards, two men and one woman, standing in front of a city skyline. They are wearing blue shirts, black ties, and black pants. The woman on the left has an American flag patch on her sleeve. The man in the middle has a '9/11 MEMORIAL' patch on his shirt. The man on the right has a '11' patch on his shirt. They are all looking directly at the camera with serious expressions. The background shows various city buildings, including one under construction with scaffolding.

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UPGRADING SECURITY: Unionization and Changes in the Workforce, Wages, and Standards in the NYC Security Industry, 2004–2011

by Nancy Rankin and Michelle Holder

About the authors:

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Acknowledgments:

Community Service Society gratefully acknowledges support from the Service Employees International Union, Local 32BJ that made this report possible. The Community Service Society, however, is solely responsible for its content and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of 32BJ. The authors would also like to thank the security officers who graciously agreed to be interviewed for this research and share their personal experiences, Apurva Mehrotra, CSS policy analyst, and Alia Winters, CSS Director of Marketing and Communications, for overseeing editing and production.



The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) draws on a 169-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. We respond to urgent, contemporary challenges through applied research, advocacy, litigation, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of people stream into New York City each day to do business in our office towers, study on our college campuses, obtain care at our leading hospitals, and visit our cultural landmarks. Their safety depends on the work of security officers. It is these workers who screen visitors, protect property, keep an eye out for suspicious packages, and are prepared to safely evacuate crowds in an emergency. In a post 9/11 world, particularly in Manhattan, the role of security officers cannot be taken lightly.

Yet for years, these workers were for the most part among the working poor, low-paid and minimally trained, a state of affairs which shortchanged both security officers and the public they were hired to protect. In our 2006 report, *Shortchanging Security: How Poor Training, Low Pay, and Lack of Job Protection for Security Guards Undermine Public Safety in New York City*, we described the employees and working conditions in the security industry, with a focus on large commercial office buildings in midtown and lower Manhattan.

At that time, we found a workforce that was:

- **Predominantly male and black:** nearly 84 percent were men, more than half were black, and another one in five were Latino;
- **Not highly educated:** nearly a quarter lacked a high school diploma (although a significant minority of 37 percent had at least some college);
- **Poorly paid:** the median hourly wage for security officers in the New York City area stood at \$9.89, compared to a median hourly wage for all workers of \$18.17;
- **By and large lacking benefits** like employer-provided health insurance or paid sick leave;
- **Ill-trained,** despite serious responsibilities for public safety;

- **Characterized by high turnover;** and
- **Struggling to get by** and support their families.

Only a small segment of the industry was unionized—about 1,000 security officers were represented by 32BJ SEIU in 2004. In focus group interviews, these unionized workers, unlike their peers described above, told a different story. Although not highly paid, they brought home sufficient wages and benefits to provide the basics for their families and felt they had received enough training to approach their jobs with professionalism.

Beginning in 2006, unionization of the security industry in New York City increased dramatically. By 2011, 32BJ SEIU had organized close to 10,000 workers, a tenfold increase, with unionized security officers having a major presence in midtown and lower Manhattan's large prime commercial office buildings, Port Authority facilities, public buildings, and institutions of higher education. Many predominantly non-unionized security officers are also employed at retail locations, warehouses, and residential buildings.

In the wake of growing unionization, CSS thought it would be important to take another look at the security sector labor force and their working conditions. Have security officers in New York City experienced gains in wages and benefits? How have security officers employed locally fared compared to national wage trends in the security industry and relative to pay levels of other low-wage occupations in New York City from 2004 to 2011? Does unionization appear to be having an impact in lifting wages and improving the quality of the workforce? And how far has the industry come? Is being a security officer still a low-income occupation, where workers depend on public benefits like food stamps and Medicaid to survive? To answer these questions, we analyzed publicly-available data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Employment Statistics.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF NEW YORK CITY'S SECURITY OFFICERS



While the large majority of security officers are still men of color, in the ten years since 2000, the proportion of women and Latinos in the occupation has grown somewhat (Table 1). A more notable change from 2000 to 2010, however, has been a shift in the age distribution among New York City security officers. The workforce is now older, with nearly a quarter of security officers

ages 55 and over, compared to 16.9 percent ten years ago. Younger workers, ages 16 to 24, who made up 15 percent of workers in 2000, now account for less than 10 percent. This should be kept in mind when considering the adequacy of wages in the industry: these are not mostly young people just starting out but more likely to be experienced workers with families to support.

Table 1 – Characteristics of Security Guards in Comparison to Workforce in New York City 2000 to 2010

	2000		2010		Percentage Point Change 2000-2010	
	Security Guards*	Total NYC Workforce	Security Guards	Total NYC Workforce	Security Guards	Total NYC Workforce
GENDER						
Female	16.2%	48.8%	20.3%	50.2%	4.1	1.4
Male	83.8%	51.2%	79.7%	49.8%	-4.1	-1.4
AGE						
16-24	15.0%	11.9%	9.5%	9.7%	-5.5	-2.2
25-54	68.1%	74.0%	66.2%	69.9%	-1.9	-4.1
55 or Older	16.9%	14.1%	24.3%	20.4%	7.4	6.3
RACE & ETHNICITY						
White non-Hispanic	19.6%	43.1%	16.8%	41.4%	-2.8	-1.7
Black non-Hispanic	53.5%	21.9%	50.3%	20.5%	-3.2	-1.4
Latino/Hispanic, Any Race	19.6%	22.6%	25.4%	22.8%	5.8	0.2
Asian	6.2%	11.5%	7.3%	14.3%	1.1	2.8
Other (non-Hispanic)	1.2%	0.9%	0.3%	1.0%	-0.9	0.1
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT						
Less than High School Graduate	23.8%	18.1%	14.3%	12.8%	-9.5	-5.3
High School Graduate	38.8%	22.4%	35.4%	21.0%	-3.4	-1.4
Some College or Associate's Degree	26.2%	24.8%	35.4%	23.5%	9.2	-1.3
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	11.2%	34.7%	14.9%	42.7%	3.7	8.0
NATIVITY						
Citizen by Birth	58.1%	55.4%	54.9%	54.2%	-3.2	-1.2
Foreign Born	41.9%	44.6%	45.1%	45.8%	3.2	1.2

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.
 *NOTE: This occupational category also includes "Gaming Officers" of which there are estimated to be none in New York City.

Educational attainment has also increased among security officers. While the occupation used to provide jobs for significant numbers of less-educated workers, that is now much less the case. Nearly a quarter of security officers had less than a high school diploma in 2000, compared to just 14.3 percent in 2010. While 37.4 percent had at least some college a decade ago, that number has now climbed to half, with most of the increase occurring among those with less than a bachelor's degree. This occupation once provided a pool of jobs, not easily outsourced, to less-educated workers—particularly black men with less than a high school diploma. To compete for those same jobs today requires more education.

In part, the shift toward a more educated and older security workforce is likely a result of higher pay and better benefits, like health insurance, attracting and retaining more qualified workers, including older workers with families. We may also be seeing the effects of the

recession, as better-educated workers who have lost their jobs have been forced to seek work in lower-paying fields, “bumping out” younger, less-qualified workers. While national trends are in the same direction, with security officers becoming somewhat older and more educated, the increase in wages is greater in New York City and so is the shift towards workers with higher educational attainment. Adjusted for inflation, real median wages in the security industry have remained fairly stagnant nationwide, increasing by one percent for the U.S. (from \$11.39 in 2004 to \$11.49 in 2011) compared to a hefty 10.3 percent gain in New York City over the same period (Table 4). For the U.S., the proportion of workers with more than a high school education went up 9.5 percentage points in the last decade, compared to 13 percentage points in New York City (Table 2). This suggests that wage gains in New York have played a role in raising the caliber of the security workforce.

Table 2 – A Comparison of Workforce Characteristics, U.S. and NYC Security Guards*, 2000 to 2010

	Security Guards, U.S. 2000	Security Guards, U.S. 2010	Percentage Point Change, Security Guards in U.S.	Percentage Point Change, Security Guards in NYC
AGE				
16-24	16.1%	13.1%	-3.0	-5.5
25-54	57.4%	56.5%	-0.9	-1.9
55 or Older	26.5%	30.4%	3.9	7.4
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
Less than High School Graduate	16.2%	7.4%	-8.8	-9.5
High School Graduate	35.3%	34.6%	-0.7	-3.4
Some College or Associate's Degree	37.9%	42.6%	4.7	9.2
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	10.6%	15.4%	4.8	3.7

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.

*NOTE: This occupational category also includes “Gaming Officers” of which there are estimated to be none in New York City.

Security officers talk about their jobs . . . and the difference a union makes.



“You can change
the workplace
for the better.”

– Izzy

For the first seven of his 17 years in security, **Izzy**, age 38 and Puerto Rican, held a non-union job. He says, “I have an idea what it’s like to struggle making \$9.75 an hour, no health benefits, no job protection, no room for advancement either.” He recounts the time he sprained his ankle. Without either health insurance or paid sick leave, he says, “I lost three days pay and had a \$600 bill from the emergency room on top of it.”

Now a member of 32BJ, he has advanced to become a fire safety director earning \$20.55 an hour, with “five paid sick days, job protection and a just grievance process.” The employer-paid family health coverage is especially important to him as a family man. “In December my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, so it really, really helped a lot. Everything [our contract] provided saved my wife’s life. I just think about the people that don’t have those resources.”

Izzy has nothing but praise for the union’s training program, which offers courses paid for by employers. “There’s training to be a handyman, locksmith, to get your citizenship, your GED . . . so you can advance yourself. It was something that was never possible before. It’s not a dead end job. It brings a certain amount of dignity and respect, opportunities to move forward in life and not just be stuck at a post.”

Beyond the concrete union benefits, Izzy points to the sense of greater job security that comes from changes in disciplinary procedures. “Fairness was missing from the industry before. [Management] saw us as commodities, not people. You can change the workplace for the better.”

Marcus, a 33-year-old African-American married father of two, and Air Force veteran, speaks with pride about working as a security officer at a high profile midtown Manhattan office building. “We’re trying to make you safe, so you can go home to your family at night. That’s how seriously we look at it. After 9/11 . . . we take that really to heart. If something happens, we are responsible,” he explains.

When Marcus started 13 years ago as a non-union security officer, he was making \$6.50 an hour with no benefits. His firm offered health insurance but, with a required employee contribution of \$120 a week for family coverage, it just wasn’t affordable to someone earning \$260 a week. He describes how not having sick days was a problem, too, “When my little son had seizures, I had to take three days without pay.”

When he and his co-workers won the union in 2008, his wages went up from the \$10.25 he was earning by then to \$12.25 an hour. “Now you have six paid sick days, it really helps.” Plus he gets employer-paid family health insurance coverage, a legal fund, and employer-funded training. Belonging to a union “brought a lot of stability and security.” He feels having a union makes it possible for “working class people to have a better life. Our union gives us the opportunity. . . It’s really big. You can take someone who has nothing and give them something.” Marcus sees “a lot of opportunities to advance in the field now, it’s a big industry, really taking off. With the union being in there, it’s really sealed the deal. . . [workers] are not being careless or negative, have better relationships with supervisors and account managers, and the high turnover rate went down a bit.”

SECURITY OFFICER WAGE TRENDS



Compared to other similarly-skilled low-wage occupations in New York City, security officers experienced the largest relative increase in their median hourly wages from 2004 to 2011 (Table 3). Their nominal wages increased by just over \$3 per hour, or 31.3 percent, over this time period. The percentage increase in security guard wages was higher than that for workers overall in the city, which grew by 17.7 percent from 2004 to 2011.

Adjusting for inflation, real wages for New York City security officers grew by 10.3 percent from 2004 to 2011, making this the only group to experience a real wage gain among all the low-wage occupations we examined, with the exception of landscaping and

groundskeeping workers, who saw a much smaller increase in real wages of 4.1 percent (Table 4). Indeed, security officers experienced a significant real increase in their pay, while workers overall in the city actually saw their real median wages decline by 1.1 percent over the seven-year period ending in 2011.

As previously indicated, the city's security officers saw a 31.3 percent increase in their (nominal) median hourly wages from \$9.89 to \$12.99 from 2004 to 2011. In comparison, the median hourly wage for security officers in the New York metropolitan area, which includes the five boroughs as well as Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Bergen, Passaic, and Hudson counties, increased less, by

Table 3 – Wages* for Selected Occupations, New York City 2004 Compared to 2011

Occupation	Median Hourly Wage** 2004	Median Hourly Wage** 2011	Percentage Change 2004 to 2011
All Workers	\$18.17	\$21.39	17.7%
Security Guards	\$ 9.89	\$12.99	31.3%
Telemarketers	\$12.77	\$12.84	0.5%
Janitors and Cleaners	\$12.74	\$14.84	16.5%
Landscaping & Groundskeeping Workers	\$12.99	\$16.10	23.9%
Tire Repairers and Changers	\$15.58	\$10.35	-33.6%
Truck Drivers, Light and Delivery	\$15.05	\$16.31	8.4%
Laborers and Material Movers	\$10.46	\$12.07	15.4%

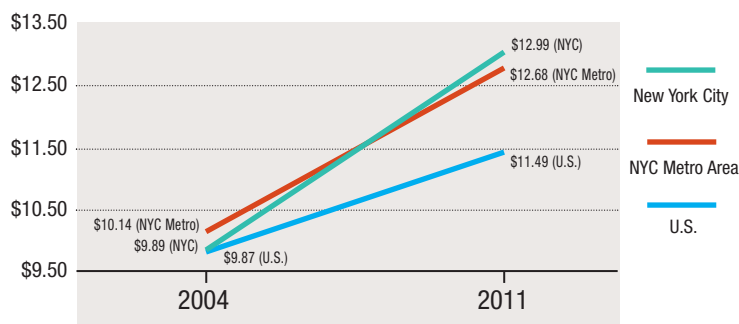
Sources: New York State Department of Labor *2004 numbers not adjusted for inflation.
 **Median hourly wage includes both unionized and non-unionized workers.

Table 4 – Real Wages for Selected Occupations, New York City 2004 Compared to 2011

Occupation	Median Hourly Real Wage* 2004 (in Constant 2011 Dollars)	Median Hourly Wage* 2011	Percentage Change 2004 to 2011
All Workers	\$21.64	\$21.39	-1.1%
Security Guards	\$11.78	\$12.99	10.3%
Telemarketers	\$15.21	\$12.84	-15.6%
Janitors and Cleaners	\$15.17	\$14.84	-2.2%
Landscaping & Groundskeeping Workers	\$15.47	\$16.10	4.1%
Tire Repairers and Changers	\$18.55	\$10.35	-44.2%
Truck Drivers, Light and Delivery	\$17.92	\$16.31	-9.0%
Laborers and Material Movers	\$12.46	\$12.07	-3.1%

Sources: New York State Department of Labor; U.S. Department of Labor Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers used to calculate real wages in 2011 dollars. *Median hourly (real) wage includes both unionized and non-unionized workers.

**Chart 1 – Change in Security Guard Hourly Wages, 2004-2011
U.S., NYC Metro Area, and New York City**



Sources: NYS Department of Labor for New York City data; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics for U.S. and NYC Metro Area data. *2004 numbers not adjusted for inflation. NOTE: NYC Metro Area includes the 5 boroughs as well as Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Bergen, Passaic, & Hudson counties.

only 25.1 percent through 2011. Wages for security officers went up by about half as much nationally as in New York City—16.2 percent compared to 31.3 percent—from 2004 to 2011.

In short, wages rose most in New York City, where the growth in union membership was concentrated, compared to the wider metropolitan region, and security guard wages rose much more sharply in the city than in the nation as a whole. These findings suggest that the wave of organizing during the years 2006 to 2011 in New York City exerted a powerful impact on boosting pay for security officers.

Security Officer Training

Training and registration requirements for security officers in New York State are mandated by the Security Guard Act of 1992. Security officers must complete an 8 hour “Pre-Assignment” training course before registering with the state and complete a 16 hour “On-the-Job” training course within 90 days of employment as a security officer. In addition, each year registered security officers are required to complete an 8 hour “In-Service” training course.

State-approved training programs, including the program run by 32BJ and available to union members, cover a fairly similar set of topics on paper. However, the union

training program, more robust and developed in partnership with the New York Police Department and others, goes into topics in greater depth. It extends over five days compared to the eight hours of pre-assignment training and the 16 hours of on-the-job training in the non-union program. Anecdotal evidence from interviews with security officers suggests that the real differences may be even greater. Some non-union training sessions have been described by attendees we spoke to as perfunctory, lasting two hours a day, where participants pay the fee and get their credential, without any testing. The union-sponsored training includes pre- and post-tests for the safety component.

New York State Security Officer Training Requirements	The Building Service 32BJ Thomas Shortman Training Program
24 Hours Total – 8 Hours Pre-Assignment 16 Hours On-the-Job	40 Hours Total
Courses Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Role of the Security Guard • Legal Power and Limitations • Emergency Situations • Communications and Public Relations • Access Control • Ethics and Conduct • Incident Command System • Terrorism 	Courses Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Security Profession • Laws and Liabilities • Effective Communication • Observation Skills and Report Writing • Critical Incident Response • Crime Prevention for Security Professional • Terrorism Awareness and Response • Safety and Fire Protection • Use of Fire Extinguishers • Access Control and Security Technology • Customer Service • American Heart Association – CPR • American Heart Association – AED (Automated External Defibrillator)

Security officers talk about their jobs . . . and the difference a union makes.



“I knew guys
making \$6 and
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– Lee

A photographer and technician, **Lee** lost his job when the company he worked for closed down. The economy was bad, and his unemployment benefits had run out, so when a neighbor who was a guard suggested working in security, he decided he'd try it out. It was after 2001, “and with the twin towers going down . . . security was hiring like mad,” but the pay and respect were, “not much.” Lee's first job in 2001 paid \$9.50 an hour with no benefits. “I knew guys making \$6 and \$7 an hour, having their paychecks bounce and having a really rough time. . . there were no standards for getting paid a decent wage.”

Lee was familiar with unions because he had been in the Teamsters as a photographer. “So when [organizing started], I thought it was a very good thing.” The company he works for now has a union contract. Lee directs guests at the entrance and patrols the perimeter of a leading financial firm in a midtown office tower. He earns \$14.40 an hour with family health coverage and about 4 paid sick days. “Health care is the most important benefit for anybody,” he adds. “I would put health care on a par with wages.”

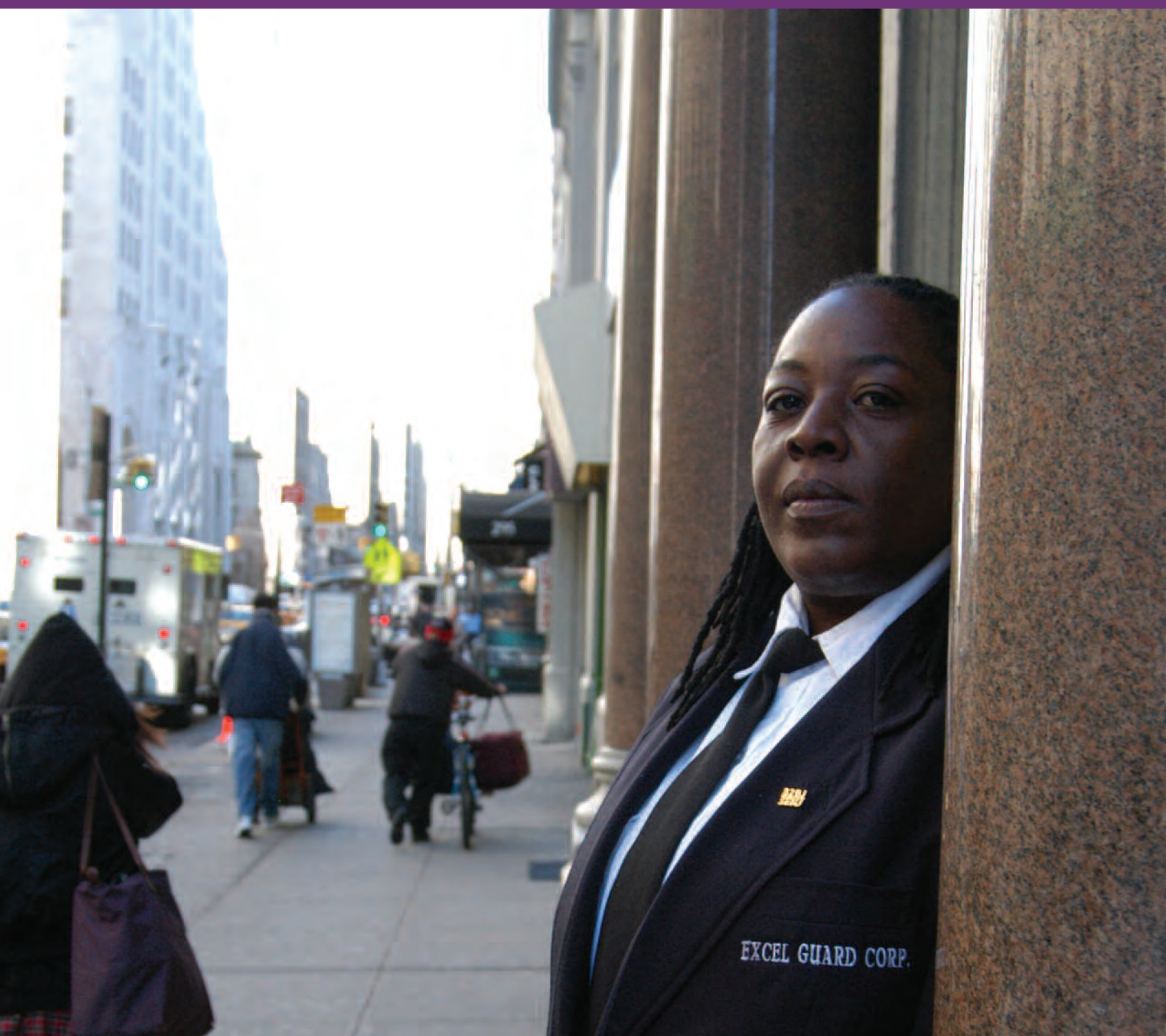
Lee describes security officers as professionals and takes pride in making sure things run smoothly. “It's a hell of a profession. The older guys, they have that pride and deter a lot of trouble. We're on the front lines. Any crazy person can run into a building,” he says, recalling recent shooting rampages. “We are very, very important.”

Lee sees a big difference in today's unionized workforce. Right after 9/11, he says, companies were scrambling to hire, and you'd see workers coming in late, out of uniform. He says over the years it's gotten better. He cites the current bad economy as one reason the quality of people in the profession has gotten better, but also thinks the gradual improvement in wages and benefits that has come with having a union matters. “There's a future in it and this industry is growing, but it takes 32BJ to make it grow the right way.” At age 70, Lee, a married black man with grown children, has no immediate plans to retire. He says, “A lot of folks now are working past retirement because of the economy and worries about cuts to Medicare.”

After a lifetime of jobs in back-office bank operations, **Joe**, a white married father of grown children, found himself out of work, as those positions were either eliminated or moved to less expensive labor markets. So about five years ago, at age 57 and with some college, he got work as a security officer posted at the parking facility for a large Wall Street firm. Initially, Joe had to take a pay cut, going from \$25 an hour to just \$14 with few benefits from his non-union security company. Then the Wall Street firm made a change to unionized security officers. When the original contractor refused to become a union shop, the firm switched security companies. Joe explained that the new employer, “allowed all the workers to transition, so nobody lost their jobs.” Joe has a few complaints, but with the union job he now earns \$16.57 an hour with six paid sick days, more vacation, health insurance with no employee contribution, retirement savings, training, and legal funds. He says, “Benefits are very important to me. Taking the lesser paying job of security was easier to swallow because of the benefits. The economic situation dictated the route I took. A security job was a fall-back which I took because it had benefits.” With a wife who was hospitalized and is now home taking 19 medications, health insurance is vital.

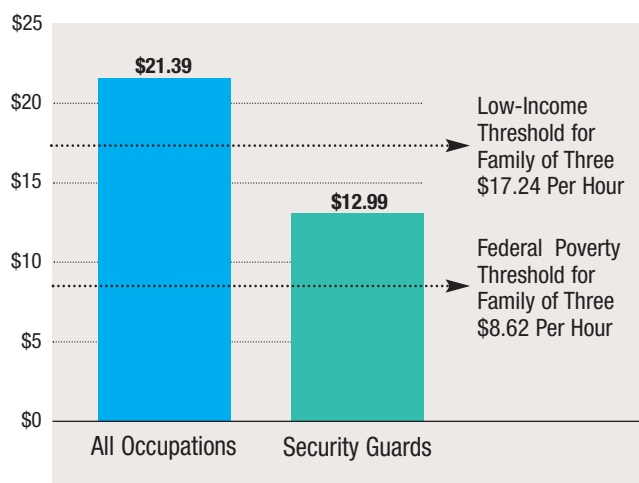
Many of his younger co-workers on night shifts are taking college courses with bigger goals in mind. Joe doesn't see many opportunities to move up where he is now and says that at his age, it's too late to go back to school to become a doctor or lawyer. Having to continuously be on the watch makes the job difficult and tedious, plus Joe is not permitted to eat, drink or read in his booth. Still, he sees security “as a decent job” and one where he's “able to manage” living on Staten Island. In comparison, he describes a non-union airport worker at Delta making \$8 an hour: “\$8 and \$16 an hour . . . that's the difference between a non-union and a union shop.” Joe understands the pressures on employers but asks, if the pay is so low, “How can the people you have working for you live?”

SECURITY OFFICER WAGES COMPARED TO LOW-INCOME THRESHOLD



While hourly pay for security officers in New York City has risen in recent years, especially relative to other low-wage occupations, the current median wage of \$12.99 an hour still leaves a full-time, year-round worker barely earning 150 percent of the federal poverty level. (Chart 2). Union security officers do better; median starting hourly rates across current contracts are \$14.35 an hour, as of July 1, 2012. Union contracts also typically include better benefits than non-union workers receive—and these benefits form an important part of the total compensation package. The union goal is for all security contracts to provide at least employee health coverage by July 2013, with some including family coverage.

Chart 2 – NYC Median Hourly Wage in 2011 for All Occupations and Security Guards with Low-Income and Poverty Thresholds



Sources: New York State Department of Labor for wage data; U.S. Census Bureau for 2011 federal poverty threshold.
NOTE: CSS defines low-income as twice the federal poverty threshold for the applicable family size

While workers in New York City’s security industry have made progress, clearly there is still room for improvement. The reliance of many security officers on public benefits to enable their families to survive in New York City provides evidence that overall pay and benefits remain inadequate in the industry, despite the gains made in the unionized sector. Twenty-two percent of security workers reported receiving food stamps and 20 percent received Medicaid in 2010 (Table 5). Less than 60 percent received employee health insurance. While it is difficult to predict exactly how implementation of the Affordable Care Act will affect future coverage, many security officers now lack insurance¹ because either their employer does not offer coverage, or the coverage is offered but too expensive for low-wage workers to afford. Nationally, Medicaid makes up some of the gap—but only for seven percent of workers in security jobs. Medicaid utilization rates are much higher for New York. This may be partly attributable to the more generous income eligibility standards in New York compared to many other states.²

Table 5 – Utilization of Public Benefits and Access to Employee Health Benefits Among Security Guards in the U.S. and New York City, 2010

	Percent Receiving	
	U.S.	New York City
Food stamps	12%	22%
Cash public assistance	1%	2%
Medicaid	7%	20%
Employer or union health insurance	62%	58%

Source: Authors’ analysis of American Community Survey data from Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5. 0 [machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.

¹ Harvard University researchers have found that the uninsured had a 25 percent greater risk of death compared to those who had private health insurance. See Wilper, Woolhandler, et.al., “Health Insurance and Mortality in U.S. Adults,” *Am J of Public Health*, December 2009, Vol. 99, No. 12, pp. 2289-95.

² See “Where Are States Today? Medicaid and CHIP Eligibility Levels for Children and Non-Disabled Adults,” Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, July 2012.

CONCLUSION

At a time when private-sector unions have been losing ground, and public-sector unions have increasingly come under attack, 32BJ's recent success in organizing security officers in New York City serves as an important reminder of the critical role unions play in raising wage levels and improving conditions for low-paid workers. Since its effort began in 2006, 32BJ SEIU has organized close to 10,000 security officers, giving them a major presence among security officers employed in midtown and lower Manhattan's prime commercial office buildings and certain other locations. Compared to other low-wage occupations in New York City, security pay rose substantially. Median real wages for security officers increased by 10.3 percent between 2004 and 2011; during that same time real wages for city workers in all occupations actually fell by 1.1 percent. Updating our earlier study, we compared the changes in pay for security officers with what happened in other occupations that employ workers at similar wage and skill levels. We found that real wages in the other occupations declined, some significantly, with the exception of landscapers, who saw a 4.1 percent gain in pay.

Median hourly wages for union security officers are \$14.35 an hour in contracts negotiated by 32BJ as of July 1, 2012. Overall median hourly wages for security officers, including union and non-union workers, are \$12.99. A comparison of wage trends for security officers in New York City, the wider metropolitan area, and the United States show that wages rose most sharply for the

city, somewhat less for the region, and least for the nation. This suggests that the greater wage gains in New York, where union activity was concentrated, made the difference and that observed wage gains were not just reflecting rising pay in the industry overall. There is also likely spillover, with higher wages in the unionized sector pushing up wages in the non-union sector, as employers compete for workers. In addition, some contract security firms may be raising wages to fend off the perceived threat of unionization. The majority of workers employed as security officers in New York are men of color, half with a high school education or less, groups that experience high rates of joblessness. The ability of unionization to boost wages for these workers has positive implications for the well-being of the city's black and Latino communities.

While the impact of organizing and the wage gains have been impressive, there remains room for improvement. A median wage of \$12.99 an hour is barely enough for a full-time, year-round worker to lift a family of three above the federal poverty level. The fact that about one in five security officers report receiving food stamps and Medicaid, even now, reveals that when employers fail to provide adequate wages and benefits, like health insurance, they are shifting costs onto the public sector. Continued organizing can provide a path to bring these workers—and their families and communities—closer to the middle class.

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